

HEART of the SUNSET

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CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

A little later Paloma, pale and heavy-eyed, stole into the room, and Dave's cheerful greeting awoke Mrs. Strange with a jerk.

"So! You're feeling better, aren't you?" the latter woman cried, heartily.

"Yes. How did I get here?" Dave asked. "I must have been right sick and troublesome to you."

Paloma smiled and nodded. "Sick! Why, Dave, you frightened us nearly to death! You were clear out of your head!"

Mrs. Strange broke into his frowning meditation to ask, "How long since you had a night's sleep?"

"I— Oh, the prosecutor at Brownsville didn't let me alone a minute for a week."

"Umph! I thought so. You puzzled that pill-popper, but doctors don't know anything, anyhow. Why, he wanted to wake you up to find out what ailed you! I threatened to scold him if he did."

"I seem to remember talking a good deal," Dave ventured. "I reckon I— said a lot of foolish things." He caught the look that passed between his nurses and his significance distressed him.

Mrs. Strange continued: "That's how we guessed what your trouble was, and that's why I wouldn't let that fool doctor disturb you. Now that you've had a sleep and are all right again, I'm going home and change my clothes. I haven't had them off for two nights."

"Two nights!" Dave stared in bewilderment. Then he lamely apologized for the trouble he had caused, and tried to thank the women for their kindness.

He was shaky when, an hour later, he came downstairs for breakfast; but otherwise he felt better than for many days; and Blaise's open delight at seeing him did him as much good as the food he ate.

Dave spent part of the morning sunning himself on the porch, reading the papers with their exciting news. During his absence Paloma had done her best to spoil Montrosa, and among other marks of favor had allowed her free run of the yard, where the shade was cool and the grass fine, and where delicious tidbits were to be had from the kitchen for the mere asking. In consequence, Dave did not remain there long until he was discovered. Montrosa signaled, then trotted toward him with ears and tail lifted. Her delight was open and extravagant; her welcome was as enthusiastic as a horse could make it. Gone were her coquetry and airs; she nosed and nuzzled Dave; she rubbed and rooted him with the violence of a battering-ram, and permitted him to hug her and murmur words of love into her velvet ears. She swapped confidence for confidence, too; and then, when he finally walked back toward the house, she followed closely, as if fearful that he might again desert her.

Phil Strange met the lovers as they turned the corner of the porch, and warmly shook Dave's hand. "Teeny— my wife— told me you was better," he began, "so I beat it out here. I hung around all day yesterday, waiting to see you, but you was batty."

"I was pretty sick," Dave acknowledged. "Mrs. Strange was mighty kind to me."

"Sick people get her goat. She's got a way with 'em and with animals, too. Why, Rajah, the big python with our show, took sick one year, and he'd have died sure only for her. Same with a lot of the other animals. She knows more'n any vet I ever saw."

"Perhaps I needed a veterinary instead of a doctor," Dave smiled. "I guess I've got some horse blood in me. See!" Montrosa had thrust her head under his arm and was waiting for him to scratch her ears.

"Well, I brought you some mail," Strange fumbled in his pocket for a small bundle of letters, explaining: "Blaze gave me these for you as I passed the post office."

Dave took the letters with a word of thanks, and thrust them carelessly into his pocket. "What seems to be the trouble?" he inquired.

"You remember our last talk? Well, them Mexicans have got me rattled. I've been trying everywhere to locate you. If you hadn't come home I'd have gone to the prosecuting attorney, or somebody."

"Then you've learned something more?"

Phil nodded, and his sallow face puckered with apprehension. "Rosa Morales has been to see me regular."

Dave passed an uncertain hand over his forehead. "I'm not in very good shape to tackle a new proposition, but— what is it?"

"We've got to get Mrs. Austin away from here."

"We? Why?"

"If we don't they'll steal her."

"Steal her?" Dave's amazement was patent. "Are you crazy?"

"Sometimes I think I am, but I've pumped that Morales girl dry, and I can't figure anything else out of what she tells me. Her and Jose expect to make a lump of quick money, jump to Mexico, get married, and live happy ever after. Take it from me, it's Mrs. Austin they aim to cash in on."

"Why—the idea's ridiculous!" "Maybe it is and maybe it ain't," the fortune-teller persisted. "More than one rich Mexican has been grabbed and held for ransom along this river; yes, and Americans, too, if you can believe the stories. Anything goes in that country over there."

"You think Jose is planning to kidnap her? Nonsense! One man couldn't do such a thing."

"I didn't say he could," Phil defended himself, sulkily. "Remember, I told you there was somebody back of him."

"Yes, I remember, but you didn't know exactly who."

"Well, I don't exactly know yet. I thought maybe you might tell me."

There was a brief silence, during which Dave stood frowning. Then he appeared to shake himself free from Phil's suggestions.

"It's too utterly preposterous. Mrs. Austin has no enemies; she's a person of importance. If by any chance she disappeared—"

"She's done that very little thing," Strange declared.

"What?"

"She's disappeared—anyhow, she's gone. Yesterday when I saw you was laid up and couldn't help me, I phoned her ranch; somebody answered in Spanish, and from what I could make out they don't know where she is."

Dave wondered if he had understood Strange right, or if this could be a trick of his own tired brain. Choosing his words carefully, he said: "Do you mean to tell me that she's missing and they haven't given an alarm? I reckon you didn't understand the message, did you?"

Strange shrugged. "Maybe I didn't. Suppose you try. You sabs the lingo."

Dave went to the telephone, leaving Phil to wait. When he emerged from the house a few moments later, it was with a queer, set look upon his face.

"I got 'em," he said. "She's gone—left three days ago."

"Where did she go?"

"They wouldn't tell me."

"They wouldn't?" Strange looked up sharply.

"Wouldn't or couldn't?" The men eyed each other silently; then Phil inquired:

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I don't know. She wasn't kidnaped, that's a cinch, for Dolores went with her. I—think we're exciting ourselves unduly."

The little fortune-teller broke out excitedly: "Yes we are! Why do you suppose I've been playing that Morales girl? I tell you there's something crooked going on. Don't I know? Didn't I wise you three weeks ago that something like this was coming off?"

It was plain that Phil put complete faith in his powers of divination, and at this moment his earnestness carried a certain degree of conviction. Dave made an effort to clear his tired brain.

"Very well," he said. "If you're so sure, I'll go to Las Palmas. I'll find out all about it, and where she went. If anybody has dared to— He drew a deep breath and his listlessness vanished; his eyes gleamed with a hint of their customary fire. "I reckon I've got one punch left in me," he turned and strode to his room.

As Dave changed into his service clothes he was surprised to feel a new vigor in his limbs and a new strength of purpose in his mind. When he stood in his old boots and felt the familiar drag of his cartridge-belt, when he fastened his free muscles, he realized that he was another man. Even yet he could not put much faith in Phil Strange's words—nevertheless, there might be a danger threatening Alaire; and if so, it was time to act.

Phil watched his friend saddle the bay mare, then as Dave tied his rifle scabbard to its thong he laughed nervously.

"You're loaded for bear."

"I'm loaded for Jose Sanchez. If I lay hands on him I'll learn what he knows."

"You can't get nothing out of a Mexican."

"No? I've made Filipinos talk. Believe me, I can be some persuasive when I try." With that he swung a leg over Montrosa's back and rode away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Surprise.

Law found it good to feel a horse between his knees. He had not realized until now how long Montrosa's saddle had been empty. The sun was hot and friendly, the breeze was sweet in his nostrils as he swept past the smiling fields and out into the mesquite country. Heat waves danced above the

patches of bare ground; insects sang noisily from every side; far ahead the road ran a wavering course through a deceitful mirage of rippling ponds. It was all familiar, pleasant; it was home. With every mile he covered his strength and courage increased.

Such changes had come into his life since his last visit to Las Palmas that it gave him a feeling of unreality to discover no alteration in the ranch. He had somehow felt that the buildings would look older, that the trees would have grown taller, and so when he finally came in sight of his destination he reined in to look.

Behind him he heard the hum of an approaching motor, and he turned to behold a car racing along the road he had just traveled. The machine was running fast, as a long streamer of choking dust gave evidence, and Dave soon recognized it as belonging to Jonesville's prosecuting attorney. As it tore past him its owner shouted something, but the words were lost. In the automobile with the driver were several passengers, and one of these likewise called to Dave and seemed to motion him to follow. When the machine slowed down a half-mile ahead and veered abruptly into the Las Palmas gateway, Dave lifted Montrosa to a run, wondering what pressing necessity could have induced the prosecuting attorney to risk such a reckless burst of speed.

Dave told himself that he was unduly apprehensive; that Strange's warnings had worked upon his nerves. Nevertheless, he continued to ride so hard that almost before the dust had settled he, too, turned into the shade of the palms.

Yes, there was excitement here; something was evidently very much amiss, judging from the groups of ranch hands assembled upon the porch. They were clustered about the doors and windows, peering in. Briefly they turned their faces toward Law; then they crowded closer, and he perceived that they were not talking. Some of them had removed their hats and held them in their hands.

Dave's knees shook under him as he dismounted; for one sick, giddy instant the scene swam before his eyes; then he ran toward the house and up the steps. He tried to frame a question, but his lips were stiff with fright. Heedless of those in his path, he forced his way into the house, then down the hall toward an open door, through which he saw a room full of people. From somewhere came the shrill wailing of a woman; the house was full of hushed voices and whisperings. Dave had but one thought. From the depths of his being a voice called Alaire's name until his brain rang with it.

A bed was in the room, and around it was gathered a group of white-faced people. With rough hands Law cleared a way for himself, and then stopped, frozen in his tracks. His arms relaxed,



Dave Stood Staring at the Master of Las Palmas.

his fingers unclenched, a great sigh whistled from his lungs. Before him, booted, spurred, and fully dressed, lay the dead body of Ed Austin.

Dave was still staring at the master of Las Palmas when the prosecuting attorney spoke to him.

"God! This is terrible, isn't it?" he said. "He must have died instantly."

"Who—did it?"

"We don't know yet. Benito found him and brought him in. He hasn't been dead an hour."

Law ran his eyes over the room, and then asked, sharply, "Where is Mrs. Austin?"

He was answered by Benito Gonzales, who had edged closer. "She's not here, senor."

"Have you notified her?"

Benito shrugged. "There has been no time. It all happened so quickly—"

Someone interrupted, and Dave saw that it was the local sheriff—evidently it was he who had waved from the speeding machine a few moments before.

"I'm glad you're here, Dave, for you can give me a hand. I'm going to round up those Mexicans right away and find out what they know. Whoever did it hasn't gone far; so you act as my deputy and see what you can learn."

When Dave had gained better control of himself he took Benito outdoors and demanded full details of the tragedy. With many lamentations and incoherencies the range boss told what he knew.

Ed had met his death within a half-mile of Las Palmas as he rode home for dinner. Benito, himself on his way to the house, had found the body, still warm, near the edge of the pecan grove. He had retained enough sense to telephone at once to Jonesville, and

then—Benito hadn't knew what he had done since then, he was so badly shaken by the tragedy.

"What time did it happen?"

"It was noon when I came in."

Dave consulted his watch, and was surprised to discover that it was now only a few minutes past one. It was evident, therefore, that Benito had indeed lost no time, and that his alarm had met with instant response.

"Now tell me, who did it?"

Benito flung his hands high. "God knows! Some enemy, of course; but Don Eduardo had many."

"Not that sort of enemies. There was nobody who could wish to kill him."

"That is as it is."

"Haven't you any suspicions?"

"No, senor."

"You say Mrs. Austin is gone?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

Dave spoke brusquely: "Come, Benito; you must know, for your wife went with her. Are you trying to keep something back?"

"No, no! As God is my judge."

Benito declared: "I didn't know they were going until the very last, and even then Dolores would tell me nothing. We were having bad times here at Las Palmas; there were stormy scenes yonder in the house. Senor Ed was drinking again, you understand?"

The senora had reason to go.

"You think she ran away to escape him?"

"Exactly."

Dave breathed more easily, for this seemed to settle Strange's theory. The next instant, however, his apprehensions were doubled, for Benito added:

"No doubt she went to La Feria."

Law uttered an incredulous exclamation. "Not there! Surely she wouldn't go to La Feria at such a time. Why, that country is ablaze. Americans are fleeing from Mexico."

"I hadn't thought of that," Benito confessed. "But if she didn't go there, where did she go? Saints above! It is a fine condition of affairs when a wife keeps secrets from her husband, eh? I suppose Dolores feared I would tell Don Eduardo, God rest his soul! This much I do know, however: not long ago there came a letter from General Longoria, offering settlement for those cattle he stole in his government's name. Dolores told me the senora was highly pleased and was going to Mexico for her money. It was a mark of Longoria's favor, you understand me? He's a great—friend, an ardent admirer." Benito winked. "Dolores told me all about that, too. No, I think they went to La Feria."

Dave remembered his first conversation with Phil Strange and the fortune-teller's insistence that some powerful person was behind Jose Sanchez. More than three weeks ago Strange had forecast something very like this murder of Ed Austin. Dave felt as if he were the victim of an hysterical imagination. Nevertheless, he forced himself to ask, quietly:

"Is Jose Sanchez anywhere about?"

The range boss shrugged. "I sent him to the east pasture this morning."

"Did he go?"

"Eh? So! You suspect Jose of this. God in heaven! Jose is a wild boy— But wait! I'll ask Juan if he saw him; yes, and Victoria, too. That is Victoria you hear squalling in the kitchen. Wait here."

Benito hurried away, leaving Dave a prey to perplexity; but he was back again in a few moments. His face was grave.

"Jose did not go to the east pasture," he said.

"Where is he now?"

"No one seems to know."

Law walked to his horse, mounted, and galloped away. Benito, who watched him, saw that he turned toward the river road which led to the Las Palmas pumping plant.

The more Dave thought about Ed Austin's death, the more certain he became that it was in some way connected with Alaire's disappearance; and the loose end by which the tangle might be unraveled, it seemed to him, lay in the hands of Rosa Morales, Jose's sweetheart. That Sanchez was the murderer Dave now had little doubt; but since the chance of apprehending him was small, he turned his attention to the girl. He would make Rosa speak, he told himself, if he had to use force—this was no time for gentle methods. If she knew aught of Alaire's whereabouts or the mystery of her departure from Las Palmas, he would find a way to wring the truth from her. Dave's face, a trifle too somber at all times, took on a grimmer aspect now; he felt a slow fury kindling in his breast.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

In Danger.

Friend (to professor, whose lecture "How to Stop the War" has just been concluded)—Congratulate you, old man—went splendidly. At one time during the afternoon I was rather anxious for you.

Professor—Thanks. But I don't know why you should have been so concerned on my behalf.

Friend—Well, a rumor did go round the room that the war would be over before your lecture.—London Punch.

House Plants Must Breathe.

Turn house plants half way about at least once each week, to keep all sides alike and exposed to the light. Keep dust from them by frequent spraying or sponging, so pores will not become clogged. They must breathe or they perish.

Expert.

"I don't see how you do it." "Why not?" responded the fortune teller. "We can figure what goods the people come after just as well as any druggist clerk."

FROM ALL PARTS OF MISSISSIPPI

Reports of Interesting Events Boiled Down for Hasty Perusal.

Scosoba.—The high school grounds here were the scene of a delightful picnic given in honor of our soldier boys.

Kosciusko.—County Demonstrator E. C. McReynolds is arranging to ship a co-operative car of cattle on the 18th of this month.

Crystal Springs.—It is predicted by farmers that more cotton will be grown in this county this season than since the advent of the boll weevil.

Monticello.—All records for tomato growing in Lawrence county have been smashed by Mrs. C. E. Watts, proprietress of the Watts Hotel at Monticello.

Scosoba.—A number of serious cases of sickness are in town and community. In several cases much apprehension is felt over the recovery of the patients.

Jackson.—Young attorneys of this city, many of them well established, are flocking to the colors, and almost the entire new generation of lawyers in this vicinity will soon be in olive drab.

Greenwood.—Tax Assessor J. E. Dennis has submitted to the board of supervisors his assessment rolls and the personal roll this year shows an increase of over \$600,000 over last year.

Biloxi.—The date for the special election for the purpose of giving voters of Biloxi the opportunity to accept or reject the issuance of bonds for \$40,000 to prove the streets of Biloxi has been set for Tuesday, September 18.

Coldwater.—Rev. Howard G. Roberts, pastor of the Methodist church here, has just returned from his vacation and resumed his work. He spent a month in Gulfport and Biloxi, and returned home greatly improved.

Meridian.—The purchase of the \$6,000 Oakland Heights consolidated school bonds was approved by the board of supervisors. W. F. Temple of this city paid par, accrued interest and \$200 premium for the bonds.

Greenwood.—The Leflore county board of supervisors have abandoned the operation of the county convict farm and will sell the property. The convicts will be worked on the public roads after the present crop is harvested.

Grenada.—Dr. Paul Z. Browne, who was recently commissioned first lieutenant medical corps, United States army, received a telegram ordering him to report to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind., for active duty on or before Aug. 10.

Houlka.—It is reliably reported that a large number of drafted men around Robbs, a small precinct in southwestern part of Pontotoc county, defied the authorities of the draft law and refused to go to Pontotoc for examination.

Madison.—While a party of young people were in Pearl River bathing at the mouth of Old River at The Blue Lake Hunting and Fishing Club's House, Miss Lucile Martin of Brandon and Mr. Rufus Latham, of Fannin were drowned.

Toccopola.—The 46th annual camp meeting at the old tabernacle 18 miles west of this place and three miles east of Oxford was held last week under the able leadership of Rev. Jerome J. Baird of Ripley, assisted by Rvs. R. S. Lawson of Abbeville, Alonzo Robinson of Arkansas, F. D. Daniel of Pontotoc and others.

Coldwater.—A radical change has been made in the plan of working the roads of this district. The contractor has been released at his own request and the county is going to buy a powerful motor truck to use on the roads of this district. It will be in the nature of a demonstration, and the motor truck will be kept busy on the roads all the time.

Biloxi.—Mississippi coast raw oyster dealers have been notified by the Louisiana oyster commission that they will not be permitted to dredge for oysters even on leased ground within Louisiana territory until September 1. These dealers have been granted the privilege of getting oysters from leased grounds during the month of August for the last two years by the Louisiana commission.

Hattiesburg.—The supervisors tackled a vexatious problem when they considered raising \$30,000 for the building of a road to Camp Shelby. An additional \$35,000 for this purpose is being raised by popular subscription.

Jackson.—While the Mississippi delta will produce a good cotton crop, the cost of production will be higher than ever before in the history of that section, according to State Senator Ed Franklin, president of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta levee board.

Governor Bilbo has asked permission of the legislature to once more borrow money, the urgency of the case being apparent. A few weeks ago lightning struck the big barn on the A. & M. College grounds at Starkville, causing loss of three buildings. The loss was at least \$15,000, and it was necessary the barns be replaced before winter. Great quantities of hay and grain were also housed in these barns and provision must be made to take care of the live stock. The governor asks the legislators to send him a written agreement to vote for an appropriation of \$15,000 to repay the loan he asks authority to make.

"Blackie" Borowitz, a white man sentenced to be hanged at Vicksburg Aug. 10, has been given a ten-day respite. Borowitz was sentenced to death for the murder of Police Captain Stites of Vicksburg, but since that sentence was affirmed by the supreme court one of his "pals" now in the penitentiary for complicity in the murder, has made a confession that he fired the shot that killed the officer.

The case of Perry Wright has been called to the attention of the penitentiary authorities here and proves of interest in view of the fact that he has been on the convict farm longer than almost anybody else, fourteen or fifteen years, and has never had the lash applied to his back. That is because he has always behaved himself and is counted a "good convict."

This negro was sent up from Wilkinson county for murder, his term being for life, as a matter of course. In a letter to the secretary of the prison board he says that since he was sent up his wife and children have all died, and that so far as he knows he has not kith or kin who are able to render him any assistance in getting out of the penitentiary.

Biloxi.—H. H. Roof, who acted as secretary for the Biloxi Commercial club seven years, has resigned.

Pascagoula.—The board of supervisors let the contract for oyster shells for the new speedway between East and West Pascagoula rivers.

Greenwood.—The Leflore county board of supervisors let the contract for the building of approximately 150 miles of roads in the county.

Meridian.—Ellen Ray, mother, et al., of Jerry Ray, has filed a suit for \$15,000 damages against the Mobile & Ohio railroad, for the death of the latter.

Florence.—The directors of Beat One Fair, Rankin County, held a meeting and put things in shape to further the interests of the fair to be held this fall.

Biloxi.—The Mississippi Shipbuilding company has taken a lease on the Johnson property in this city and within a short time will begin the erection of a large plant.

Clarksdale.—Judge J. B. Killebrew, for the last 11 years justice of the peace in this city and one of the oldest residents of Clarksdale, died at his home in Oakhurst at the age of 62 years.

Gulfport.—C. E. Lewis, charged with the theft of an automobile, and Harry Parker, charged with grand larceny, escaped from the county jail by overpowering the jailer at the point of the jailer's own revolver.

Hattiesburg.—That the crusade against "numberless" autos is on in earnest in Hattiesburg was shown in the city court, when ten persons and firms were charged with operating cars without numbers.

Vicksburg.—C. R. Twiss, for the past eleven years city engineer, has received official information from Washington that he has been commissioned a captain and will have command of a division of the engineers' reserve corps.

Senatobia.—Senatobia furnished quite a number of volunteers for the army and navy last week. Those who enlisted in the army are as follows: Emmett Still, U. Z. Haltom, Ralford French, Eschel Brownlee, Woodie Harris, John Rich, Frank Pardue, Rufus Siquedille, R. H. Wooten, H. D. Riley, Roland Murphree, Sid Murphree and Earl Varner. Those who joined the navy are William Veazy, J. R. Clifton, Thomas Johnson, Beford Fennell and Newt Dean.

Jackson.—Those thirty or forty counties in Mississippi that have contracted for the construction of gravel roads, and in nearly all of which work has been suspended or delayed because of the inability of contractors to procure material on account of car shortage, will be glad to learn that some measure of relief is now promised by the commission on car service at Washington, with whom the matter was taken up and persistently pursued by Senator John Sharp Williams.

Gulfport.—Between thirty-five and forty miles of cable will be laid by the United States government from Gulfport to Ship Island, Chandelour and Horn Islands.

Waynesboro.—Reports reached officials here that ten dipping vats had been dynamited in the western part of the county.

Jackson.—Outlook for a good crop of corn and other foodstuff is excellent in Alcorn, Lee, Monroe and other counties.